



DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 679

[Docket No. 230224–0053]

RTID 0648-XD578

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Reallocation of Pacific Cod in the Western Regulatory Area of the Gulf of Alaska

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Temporary rule; reallocation.

SUMMARY: NMFS is reallocating the projected unused amount of Pacific cod from vessels using pot gear to catcher vessels using trawl gear, catcher vessels using hook-and-line gear, and vessels using jig gear in the Western Regulatory Area of the Gulf of Alaska (GOA). This action is necessary to allow the 2023 total allowable catch (TAC) of Pacific cod to be harvested.

DATES: Effective December 21, 2023, through 2400 hours, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), December 31, 2023.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Obren Davis, 907-586-7228.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: NMFS manages the groundfish fishery in the GOA according to the Fishery Management Plan for Groundfish of the Gulf of Alaska (FMP) prepared by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council under authority of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. Regulations governing fishing by U.S. vessels in accordance with the FMP appear at subpart H of 50 CFR part 600 and 50 CFR part 679.

The 2023 Pacific cod TAC specified for vessels using pot gear in the Western Regulatory Area of the GOA is 1,716 mt, as established by the final 2023 and 2024 harvest specifications for groundfish in the GOA (88 FR 13238, March 2, 2023) and one reallocation (88 FR 76141, November 6, 2023).

The 2023 Pacific cod TAC specified for catcher vessels using trawl gear in the Western Regulatory Area of the GOA is 1,526 metric tons (mt), as established by the final 2023 and 2024 harvest specifications for groundfish in the GOA (88 FR 13238, March 2, 2023) and one reallocation (88 FR 76141, November 6, 2023).

The 2023 Pacific cod TAC specified for catcher vessels using hook-and-line gear in the Western Regulatory Area of the GOA is 291 mt, as established by the final 2023 and 2024 harvest specifications for groundfish in the GOA (88 FR 13238, March 2, 2023) and one reallocation (88 FR 76141, November 6, 2023).

The 2023 Pacific cod TAC specified for vessels using jig gear in the Western Regulatory Area of the GOA is 131 mt, as established by the final 2023 and 2024 harvest specifications for groundfish in the GOA (88 FR 13238, March 2, 2023).

The Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS, (Regional Administrator) has determined vessels using pot gear will not be able to harvest 232 mt of the 2023 Pacific cod TAC allocated to those vessels under § 679.20(a)(12)(i)(A)(5).

Therefore, in accordance with § 679.20(a)(12)(ii)(B), NMFS apportions 232 mt of Pacific cod from vessels using pot gear to the annual amount specified for catcher vessels using trawl gear, catcher vessels using hook-and-line gear, and vessels using jig gear.

The harvest specifications for 2023 Pacific cod included in the final 2023 and 2024 harvest specifications for groundfish in the Western Regulatory Area of the GOA (88 FR 13238, March 2, 2023) and one reallocation (88 FR 76141, November 6, 2023) is revised as follows: 1,484 mt to vessels using pot gear, 1,531 mt to catcher vessels using

trawl gear, 516 mt to catcher vessels using hook-and-line gear, and 132 mt to vessels using jig gear.

Classification

NMFS issues this action pursuant to section 305(d) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act. This action is required by 50 CFR part 679, which was issued pursuant to section 304(b), and is exempt from review under Executive Order 12866.

Pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 553(b)(B), there is good cause to waive prior notice and an opportunity for public comment on this action, as notice and comment would be impracticable and contrary to the public interest. This requirement is impracticable and contrary to the public interest as it would prevent NMFS from responding to the most recent fisheries data in a timely fashion and would allow for harvests that exceed the originally specified apportionment of the Pacific cod TAC. NMFS was unable to publish a notice providing time for public comment because the most recent, relevant data only became available as of December 20, 2023.

The Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, NOAA also finds good cause to waive the 30-day delay in the effective date of this action under 5 U.S.C. 553(d)(3). This finding is based upon the reasons provided above for waiver of prior notice and opportunity for public comment.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*

Dated: December 20, 2023.

Everett Wayne Baxter,

Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries,

National Marine Fisheries Service.